

Notes on Plotinus - Ennead Two, Ninth Tractate - The World and That Which Generates It Are Not Evil (Against The Gnostics)

2.9.1 Refutation of Arguments for More or Less Than Three Divine Hypostases

As we have discussed elsewhere, the Nature of The Good is supremely simple and prior to everything else. After all, something must come before everything else in order to be simple. If something is not First, it exists among the complexities of other things and is therefore not irreducibly simple. Since The Good is irreducibly simple, it has no parts. It is one simple thing. The Nature of The One is precisely to be one irreducibly simple thing. Therefore, we can see that The One and The Good are one in the same. If we speak of The Good, we also speak of The One. We must be careful not to impart to The One any false judgements about its characteristics. Such comparisons are limited to helping us approximate a personal understanding to the degree that this is even possible. It is ultimately beyond the realm of distinctions and descriptive language. Do not forget that The One is ineffable.

We refer to The One as First, because it is supremely simple. We refer to The One as self-sufficient, as there is nothing antecedent to it for it to be contingent upon. We refer to The One as self-contained, because if it were contained in something else, then it would be contingent on its container and no longer be self-sufficient. Since The One is not comprised of any parts, does not come from anything else, and is not contained within anything else, we can know that it is the most primordial principle. Everything else emanates from The One.

The second rank, and the First Emanation from The One is Nous, the principle of Intellect and the source of all objects grasped via the Intellect. Third in rank, After Nous, comes Soul. This is the order of Nature. The One, Nous, and Soul form the three Divine Hypostases. We cannot propose any more or fewer Intelligible Hypostases. To argue that there are fewer, one option is to either collapse Nous and Soul into one thing, or collapse Nous and that which is First (i.e. The One) into one thing. Yet the fact that the three Hypostases are separate is demonstrated numerous times throughout this work, so our present line of inquiry requires us to determine if there can be more than three Hypostases. If there are indeed more than three, we must then determine the nature of any additional Hypostases.

As we have just demonstrated, the First principle is self-sufficient and self-contained. Therefore, it is impossible to propose that there is some principle antecedent to it. Again, that which is supremely simple is necessarily First. Those who argue for additional Hypostases (e.g. Gnostics) will divide the most primordial principle in terms of Potential (i.e. Bythos in Gnosticism) and Actual (i.e. Ennoea in Gnosticism). Yet such a division between Potential and Actual is absurd in the purely Metaphysical spheres. In purely Metaphysical spheres, the Potential is the Actuality itself, and they cannot be separated. Metaphysical things are not formed, and so they Eternally Exist as Actualities. For Potential and Actual to be applicable, something must possess at least two states it can Be in, such that when it is in one state it has the Potential to be in another state. There is only ever one state which Metaphysical things are in. They are not subject to flux. As such, the term Potential is never applicable to them.

The impossibility of Potential is also true for Nous, let alone for that which is First (i.e. The One). Nous is Eternal, and always Exists as it Actually is. Without flux, what could Potential and Actual mean within the purely Metaphysical realm of Nous? Movement (and thus flux) within and towards Nous is relegated to the realm of Soul. Further, since Soul receives its Intellectual phase directly from Nous, we cannot add a Hypostases between Nous and Soul (i.e. Aeon Jesus in Gnosticism).

Some may argue that we should divide Nous in two by differentiating between the Intellect which thinks, and the Intellect which is self-aware of the fact that it thinks. Perhaps in some animals there is a justifiable distinction between conscious and unconscious thought. Yet in Nous, we are not justified in such a distinction. Such distinctions are possible due to the ignorance of Corporeal Beings. Nous, which is pure Intellect and encompasses all Intellectual thoughts, is incapable of such ignorance. How could that which encompasses all Ideas (i.e. Nous) be ignorant of any of them?

To Divide Nous in two would absurdly create two Beings, one which possesses Ideas, the other which solely possesses the Idea of sentience. What is more, the Being which possesses knowledge of Intellectual Acts would not even be the Being which engages in Intellectual Acts. If the proponents of dividing Nous respond that the distinction is purely logical, then they should concede that there is no need to create a new substantive Hypostases as a result.

We should also consider whether it is possible for an Intellect to be completely ignorant of the fact that it engages in Intellectual Acts. If Philosophers such as ourselves who are devoted to such Intellectual Acts were ignorant of the fact that they were engaging in Intellectual acts, we would fairly be declared insane. With regards to Nous, it is impossible. All objects of thought are within Nous itself. After all, Nous is specifically the most primordial Principle which serves as the substance of all thoughts. In fact, the thoughts within Nous are Nous itself. Nous then certainly possesses the Idea of being aware that oneself is thinking. Its characteristic Act is the most primal Act of thought, and this fact exists as an Idea within Nous as well. In Nous, the Ideas and the Intellectual Acts are unified. Given that Nous is Eternally engaged in Intellectual Acts, and given the fact that all of the Ideas are within it, it is impossible for Nous to ever be ignorant of anything (least of all the nature of its own Acts). We can dismiss this distinction at once when we consider that such distinctions can regress infinitely. In addition to distinguishing thought from knowing that oneself is thinking, should we also distinguish between knowing that one knows that oneself is thinking? Given that we can repeat this process infinitely, are we then justified in proposing an infinite number of substantive divisions within Nous? Certainly not.

Finally, we cannot insert a Hypostasis between Soul and Nous which serves as the source of Intellect in Soul. Such a distinction divorces Soul from Nous altogether. Such a proposition implies that Soul does not Engage with Nous at all, and thus would not possess an Intellect at all. It would merely possess an aspect of whatever this intermediary might be. Such a proposition would ultimately deny thought to Soul, which would be incorrect.

2.9.2 Emanation Through the Divine Hypostases

In summary, we should not propose more than three Divine Hypostases. We should not entertain superfluous conceptual distinctions as a legitimate reason to create divisions where there are none. There can only be one Divine Intellect, Nous. Nous is necessarily Eternal and Unified. It is not tarnished by that which is below (i.e. Soul), and it expresses that which is above (i.e. The One) as much as is possible.

With regards to Soul, it must necessarily stand gradated between three phases. Part of Soul remains among the purely Intellectual Beings of Nous, part of Soul remains within the sensible realm, and part of it remains as mediator in between the two. Sometimes the higher portion of Soul prevails, and elevates itself entirely to the Real Beings of the Divine Intellect. Other times, the worst part of Soul prevails, and its lower phases descends to the sensible realm. Still, Soul may never descend completely and its highest part remains Divine. The Soul descends because it is ultimately distinct from the Intellectual Realm of Nous. It is not bound there by necessity, and neither is a Human Being. Soul Acts to impart the Body of

the cosmos with as much Divine Beauty as it is able to. Soul Acts without discursive reasoning, and without injecting alteration. Rather, Soul Acts in accordance with Divine Intellectual Beings that it witnesses above. The more Soul focuses on the Divine above it, the greater its own Beauty and Power. Soul is illuminated by that which is above it, and in turn Soul illuminates that which is below it. Consequently, Soul is Eternally illuminated, and Eternally illuminates.

2.9.3 The Eternal Nature of Necessity and Contingency

Since Soul is Eternally illuminated (i.e. it perpetually receives information and potency from The Ideal Beings above it), the Soul of the universe in turn transmits this light to the chain of Beings which come after it. Each life which exists beneath Soul ultimately subsists on this light, and each life absorbs as much of this light as it is able to.

A crude analogy is a fire which warms every heat conducting object surrounding it. Yet fire is an inadequate analogy. The heat from a fire is limited to a physical locus, and a fire's energy is limited to its fuel. The Illumination from the Divine has no locational limitation, and its energy is unlimited. Given a power (i.e. Divine Illumination) with unlimited energy (since all of the Ideal Beings retain their Essence and Potency Eternally) and unlimited scope (since Ideal Beings are not defined in terms of location), it is impossible to imagine anything which is not affected by it.

Thus, it is necessary that the Ideal Beings, which are the Real Beings, each impart their Essence to everything else Eternally. If this were not the case, then The Good would not be The Good, and Nous would not be Nous. The nature of Existence is a chain of Emanation. That which Exists at the most primordial level necessarily causes the things which Exist beneath it. Those things which Exist as a consequence form the second rank of Existence. Those things which Exist at the second rank are both necessitated by and contingent upon the most Primordial Existence. So, as long as the more Primordial Existence remains, the things which are necessitated by it and contingent upon it remain as well.

As a result, it is necessary that there is a chain of contingency. Everything apart from that which is First is contingent upon, and caused by that which is First. Since that which is First (i.e. The One) is uncaused and Eternal, it follows that those things which are Emanated from it were not generated at a particular point in time. They are subsequent, yet Eternal as well. It also follows that these things which are caused and sustained by the Eternal First cannot be destroyed, although objects with Potential to change form can be transformed.

Some may object and say that the Ideal Beings find their ending in Matter. In response, we ask whether or not Matter can end and be destroyed as well. If they answer that Matter can be destroyed, we ask why Matter is generated to begin with. If they answer that Matter is necessary as the final link in the chains of emanation, then we must conclude that Matter is necessarily not destroyed. Again, since Matter would then be necessitated (even if through several degrees of separation) by the Eternal First, it would be impossible to destroy because its source must remain.

Finally, if it is argued that Matter is isolated and thus possibly subject to destruction, we respond that this is impossible. If Matter is isolated, then The Divine Ideal Beings would have to be isolated from Matter in some place (The Gnostic concept of Horos). Yet the Ideal Beings are without limit in their reach. Thus, Matter cannot be cut off from them and receives Divine Illumination from them necessarily.

2.9.4 Soul Is Not Evil, and It Does Not Generate Evil

Some will argue that Soul generates the sensible world because it becomes damaged and no longer can remain in the higher realm. They will say that Soul which generates the sensible world has lost its wings and has fallen (The Gnostic theory of creation by the fall of Sophia and Achamoth). Certainly such destruction is impossible for the primordial Soul of All. If they insist that the All Soul produces the sensible world after it falls, we will ask them what caused the All Soul to fall, and at what point in time this happened. If they respond that the Soul of All is Eternally Fallen, then they imply the ridiculous notion that being fallen is Essential to Soul. If they respond that the Soul of All fell at a particular point in time, then they must account for why it fell at the point in time. Why did it not fall earlier or later?

On the contrary, we hold the fact that Soul generates the world as proof of its place in The Divine, not proof of its failure. The descent of the Soul from the Divine could only mean that it has forgotten the Divine Intellectual Beings. Yet if Soul forgot the nature of the Divine Intellectual Beings, how could it then use them to generate the sensible world? After all, the Divine Intellectual Beings are the source data from which all sensible things are Formed. All sensible things are Formed in their image. For example, how could we make a triangle if we forgot the Essence of what it is to be a triangle?

If they respond that, in acts of generation, the Soul recollects its knowledge of the Divine Intellectual Beings, we reply that this is proof that Soul has not declined. How could Soul be said to have descended if the Divine Intellectual Beings are still accessible to it? Even if it is argued that the descent merely makes the Divine Intellectual Beings dimmer and harder to grasp, would this not just serve as motivation for Soul to take a clearer look? What else could Soul's goal be in generating the sensible world? It is clearly not for its own glory. Anyone suspicious of Soul seeking glory is merely projecting the motivations of creative types of people in the sensible realm.

Some will argue that Soul creates the world after deciding to do so via discursive reasoning. Yet this does not explain how Soul generates the sensible world. We say that Soul generates the sensible world as a necessary manifestation of its very nature. If the power of generation is not the nature of Soul, then how does it generate the sensible world to begin with? If Soul is not necessarily engaged in this generative process, could it decide to destroy the world it has created if it chooses to do so? If the sensible world is Evil, as our objectors claim, why hasn't Soul come to regret generating it and destroyed it yet? If Soul does not regret generating the sensible world, then it seems as though it never will. After all, it has had more than enough time to become accustomed to it. Perhaps this time has made Soul positively disposed towards it.

Some will argue that Soul is waiting for the generated individual Souls to rejoin the Soul of All before destroying the supposedly Evil sensible world. Yet the individual Souls should have had enough time to realize that the sensible world is Evil and ceased incarnating into it by now. Soul would not be waiting for such a return anymore.

Some will argue that the generated sensible world is Evil because the sensible world contains within it many undesirable things. Those who hold this view misunderstand that nature of the sensible world. Such a view supposed that the sensible world can possibly be perfect. Yet such perfection is limited to the Divine itself. The sensible world is comprised of only temporary variant manifestations of the Divine Intellectual Beings, and is not its equal. Further, how could variant manifestations of the Divine Intellectual Beings be any better? What could be a better image of the Ideal Form of Fire than a sensible fire? What could be a better image of the Ideal Form of Earth than the sensible Earth? What could be a better image of the Divine realm, than the spinning sensible Heavenly Realm above us? What could be a better image of the Divine Sun than the sensible Sun that we witness?

2.9.5 Refutations of Absurd Notions of Soul and the Cosmos

Those we seek to refute demonstrate their own absurdity. They are Human Beings who possess bodies. As a result, they experience desire, pain, anger, and all other passions of the body. In spite of this, they insist that a part of themselves is in contact with the Divine Intellectual Realm. Yet they deny that this is the case for the Sun, whose physical nature is far more ordered and less subject to variation than that of a Human body. They deny that the Sun possesses more Wisdom than a Human being, even though humans are relatively young, inexperienced, and susceptible to deceptions which can lead us away from the truth.

They hold that the Human Soul is undying and Divine. Even the Soul of the lowliest of Human Beings. Yet they hold that Cosmos itself and the Heavenly Realm of the stars and planets above do not have an undying Divine Soul. They hold this even though the stars, planets, and the Cosmos itself are composed of Elements which are much more pure and Beautiful than those which comprise a Human. Clearly they are not blind to the order and precision of the movements of the Heavenly Realm. After all, they are the loudest critics of the disorder here on Earth. Yet we are supposed to believe that the undying Divine Soul chooses to reside in the disorder of Earth. We are supposed to believe that the Divine Soul chooses to reside in a realm which is inferior to and beneath the Heavens. We are supposed to believe that the Heavenly realm, which is more Beautiful and ordered, is also more fragile and mortal.

They absurdly propose that, in addition to the Divine Soul of All, that there is another Soul comprised of Elements. How could something comprised solely of the Elements be alive? A mixture comprised only of Elements can only produce heat, cold, wetness, dryness, or some combination of them, not life. Further, a Soul is required to bind Elements together. How could Elements bind together to form a Soul if there is not a Soul to bind them together in the First place? Such an assertion reverses the necessary order of composition. It is absurd to propose that something is required as a component in its own creation. The concept of a Soul comprised of Elements also demands an explanation as to how such an arrangement could produce consciousness. How could perception, will, and self-reflection arise in a Soul comprised only of Elements?

They do not honor this sensible Earth at all. They claim that their Creator has produced a new Earth for them, and they will ascend to it after they die. They hold that this New Earth is the Intellectual Principle of the sensible Earth. Yet why would they desire to live in the archetypical Principle of this world if they despise this world so much? Further, where does this archetypal world come from? According to our opponents, the Creator was inclined towards the creation of things in the sensible realm after producing the Intellectual Principle of the world. Why would the Creator see fit to create an inferior world after producing the better version of it First? Why did the Creator see fit to create the Intellectual Archetype in the First place? Our opponents will say that it is to be the resting place of Souls. Then why do Souls fall to the sensible world? It is as if the Intellectual Principle of the world was created in vain. Perhaps the Creator First created the sensible world, then produced the Intellectual Principle of the world by extracting the Matter from it. Then shouldn't Souls have experienced enough of the sensible world by now to have learned what they needed to from it? Why then does the sensible world persist, and why do Souls still reside here? It is sometimes said that the Souls of this world exhibit the Ideal Form of the Cosmos, but what could this even mean?

2.9.6 Corrections on Interpretation of Plato

How are we supposed to understand the additional Hypostases that they propose? What are to make of Exiles (Plerôma in Gnosticism), Impressions (Aeons in Gnosticism), and Repentances (the fall of Sophia and repentance of Achamoth in Gnosticism)?

Perhaps they are referring to the various experiences of the Soul. Repentance would then mean a change in the focus of the Soul. Impressions would then mean intermediary images of Intellectual Beings which soul perceives before it is able to discern the Intellectual Beings in of themselves. In this case, they have merely invented superfluous terminology for existing concepts in attempt to appear unique. It is as though they had no knowledge of Greek language and literature. For the Greeks have already clearly described such concepts in terms of ascension from the cave (see Plato, Republic, 514a–520a). The Greeks have achieved this using clear language, which results in a clearer understanding of the concepts involved. Those we refute here clearly stole much core ideology from Plato. The rest of their beliefs are made up nonsense which only serve to create an illusion of unique identity. In the creation of this new identity, they leave the truth behind. From Plato, they steal the concepts of the underworld of Judgement, the rivers in the underworld of Hades, and transmigration of the Soul. They take the concept of multiplicity of the Intellectual Realm (i.e. Nous) from Plato's Timaeus. Thus, they have their versions of Essence, Intellect, and the Demiurge (i.e. All Soul).

In Timaeus, we are taught that the Demiurge contemplated all of the Divine Intellectual Beings, and saw fit to generate them all into the sensible world. Yet our opponents misunderstand Plato. Here they imagine one Intellect at rest, which contains all of the Beings within it. Then they imagine another Intellect which contemplates the Intellectual Beings as they come into Being within the First Intellect. Finally, they imagine a third Intellect which thinks discursively in order to plan the Cosmos. They often conflate this third Intellect with Plato's Demiurge, though they do not understand Plato's conception of the Demiurge at all. Their lack of understanding causes them to put forward bastardized versions of Plato's doctrines. What is more, they hold that they alone have properly interpreted the nature of Intellect. They dismiss Divinely inspired teachers such as Plato as having failed to understand. They believe that by professing a multiplicity of Intellects that they have arrived at the truth. Yet by the insertion of this multiplicity, they degrade Intellect to the rank of the sensible world. The Wise will seek to reduce the multiplicity within the Divine Intellect as much as is possible. The Wise will understand that all of the distinct Intellectual Beings are within Nous itself, not outside of it or apart from it. Nous necessarily contains all Beings because it is the realm of Being (i.e. the realm in which distinct Beings exist). Nous must be the Second hypostasis, because it necessarily contains everything which Emanate after the First hypostasis. Finally, they should recognize Soul as the Third hypostasis and understand that the differences between Souls stems from their different passions and natures.

Rather than insult Divinely inspired men (i.e. Pythagoras, Plato, etc.), they would be wise to adopt their positions. They should treat these doctrines with respect given that they have endured the test of time. For both our opponents and the Divinely inspired Greek philosophers rightly agree on the immortality of the Soul, the existence of the Intellectual Realm (i.e. Nous), the Divine First (i.e. The Good), the necessity of Soul to flee from the body it animates, and that the flight of the Soul from the body results in its return to Real Being. These doctrines are expressed clearly by Plato, and our opponents are right to adopt them.

They are even at welcome to disagree with Plato and develop their own unique doctrines. However, they have no business doing so by defaming the Greeks. Where their ideas diverge, it is their responsibility to express their disagreement and alternative proposals respectfully. They should establish their point with reason and philosophically sound arguments. They should seek truth above all

else and cease attempting to create recognition for themselves by insulting Wise men whose doctrines have been respected by great minds for centuries. They should not put down the Greeks in an effort to elevate themselves.

The ancient doctrines regarding the Intellectual are far more accurate and were produced by better instructed teachers. Those today who are Wise enough to see past the delusions and deceptions which plague Humanity will clearly identify the teachings our opponents take from the ancients. The Wise will see how they adulterate these teachings with novel and inaccurate additions. To oppose the Greeks, our opponents introduce a myriad of generations and destructions which they blame on the mixture of Soul with bodies. They complain about the state of the cosmos, and decry the forces which govern reality. They conflate Soul and Intellect, and denigrate it by ascribing to it the passions found in particular Souls.

2.9.7 We Cannot Project the Nature of Individual Souls Onto the Soul of All

The fact that the sensible world has no beginning or end was established long before the founding of the school of our opponents. The fact that Soul's mingling with the body is a detriment to Soul is also a doctrine which predates the founding of our opponent's systems. Further, to project the nature of a Human Soul onto that of the Soul of All is as preposterous as projecting the dealings of a single segment of a of the population on the city as a whole. We would not judge an entire city based on the actions of a small portion of its population. For example, we would not condemn an entire city merely because their blacksmiths are known to produce subpar work.

It is important to understand that the Soul of All governs the sensible world in a very different manner than a Human Soul governs a Human body. For one, the Soul of All is not bound to a body, while a Human Soul is. In fact, a Human Soul is destined to be bound to its corresponding body before this binding is Actualized. Further, all Bodies are bound and contained within the Soul of All, but a particular Soul is by definition bound within the particular Body which it encounters. It is the area of the ensouled Body which distinguishes the part of Soul bound up with it as a particular Soul. The Soul of All could never be bound by a particular Body, as its nature is as that which encapsulates all of the Bodies. Since the Soul of All binds and contains all of the Bodies, it is impossible for any Body to bind or contain it. Anything which is within another thing cannot encapsulate that which surrounds it.

The portion of the Soul of All which remains within the Intellectual realm remains completely detached from the realm of Bodies. Further, the Soul of All receives nothing from any of the Bodies it encapsulates. All Bodies are contingent upon the Soul of All. Therefore, when the Soul of All is emanated, there cannot possibly be any Bodies present to influenced it in of itself. All things which are contingent upon another are influenced by the state of the thing they are contingent upon, but the preceding thing is not influenced by any of the things which are contingent upon it. For example, imagine grafting a branch from one tree onto a second tree. Anything which happens to the second tree will affect the branch which is grafted onto it. Yet anything which happens to the grafted branch will not affect the tree it was grafted onto. The Fire within a Human can become extinguished (destroying the Body) without extinguishing all Fires, and all of the Fire in the cosmos could be extinguished without affecting the fundamental nature of the Soul of All. The Soul of All would not be changed if somehow the sensible world was reduced to remaining Elements (i.e. Air, Water, and Earth).

The constitution of the Soul of All is different from the constitution of a single life. The Soul of All rules over all of the Elements, imparting a permanence to the sensible world. The Elements in the sensible world are thus bound twice. First in terms of their existence by the Soul of All, second in terms of their order by the particular Souls they mix with. There is no escape for a Body from the Soul of the All. Therefor, the Soul of All does not need to force or restrain them into any place. Everything within the Soul of All is naturally exactly where the Soul of All has appointed it to be.

The natural course of motion within the sensible world will destroy anything which seeks to move in a contrary way. Part of the sensible world will move in concert with everything else, harmonized with the whole. The rest which cannot harmonize will be destroyed. Imagine a large choreographed troop of dancers. If a tortoise finds itself in the middle of their dance, it will be trampled if it cannot move with the dancers. Yet if it can move with the dancers to the right places at the right times, it may go unscathed.

2.9.8 The Necessity of Demiurgic Creation in Accordance With Divine Intellect

Our opponents ask why the world was created. This is ultimately the same thing as asking why Soul exists, and why the Demiurge creates. Such questions must come from people who suppose that there is a beginning to Eternity, and that the Demiurge creates by changing things from one form into another. They should listen to our teachings about the nature of these issues so they can avoid insulting the Divinities. They all too easily slander the very things which are worthy of the utmost respect.

No one can rightly fault the Soul of All for its governance of the sensible world, as it is a reflection of the splendor of the Intellectual Realm. The sensible world is brought to life as a cohesive whole. Nothing in it exists separately from the transcendent whole. Everything is organized according to the greatest Wisdom such that all things are in their proper place. While the sensible world is only an image of the Divinities above, this is necessary. The sensible world cannot simultaneously be an image of the Divine and the Divine itself. Yet this does not have to be seen as an inadequacy. It is hardly a fault to be like a statue made in the image of Gods. Further, though it is a copy, it is not completely dissimilar. The sensible world possesses all aspects of the Divine which it can possibly express.

The sensible world is necessary, and it is not the result of some deliberate decision. The Intellectual Realm cannot be the end of emanation. Its existence is of two natures. One is its existence in of itself, the other is its creative power. After all, only something with no power at all could be the end of emanation. The only things which do not create are those things which cannot. Yet the Divine Intellectual Realm is full of limitless power, and so it Eternally creates.

Can we even imagine the nature of a world better than the one we exist in? This sensible world must be a faithful reflection of the Divine Intellectual Realm because it is created out of necessity as a result of the Divine Intellectual Realm's power. Since everything in the sensible world is necessary, there is no room for improvement and there can be no better world imaginable. Even earth is full of Animated and Immortal Beings. The Heavenly Realm of stars and planets is crowded with them. Surely the stars and plants above are like Gods. Their movement is perfectly in harmony with the movement of the universe itself. What could possibly get in their way? They cannot possibly experience the vices of life or the Evil flux of Bodies. Bodies which destroy other Bodies and are eventually destroyed themselves.

Since the stars and planets above are in perfect harmony, they must perfectly receive Intellect from the Divine itself. Then how can anyone be so arrogant as to assume that our Wisdom could be greater than theirs? Human Souls have descended in accordance with the governance of the Soul of All. How are we supposed to consider that which is contained within the Soul of All as being superior to it? Within the realm of Soul, that which governs is superior to that which receives governance.

If our opponents suppose that our descent was a choice, then why complain about the consequences of our own decision? What issues can they have with Human Life if it is a choice that can be abstained from? Since the order of the sensible world allows us the opportunity to participate in Intellect, shouldn't we consider this life dependent on this Realm of Intellect?

2.9.9 The Importance of Recognizing Divine Justice

Our opponents might focus on poverty and inequality of wealth and power within this world. Yet the Virtuous person does not concern themselves with such things. The Virtuous person knows that the wealthy is not better off than the poor, and that those with power are not better off than the average citizen. The Virtuous person leaves such preoccupations to the other kinds of people. For the Virtuous know that there are ultimately two kinds of people, those on the Virtuous path of the Sage and those of the Human masses. The aspiring Sage seeks to reach the pinnacle of return to the Divine above. Within the life of the Human masses there are two additional kinds. One which is mindful some Virtue and thus participates in some Good. The other which is so mundane that it only serves to produce the necessities required for more admirable endeavors.

Consider those who commit murders, or those who otherwise become enslaved by their passions and pleasures. Such errors are not made by a true Intellect, but by Souls undeveloped as if they were children. If life is like a training ring, is it not justified in having winners and losers? For if you are wronged, this poses no danger to the part of you which is Immortal. If you are murdered, consider yourself liberated from this life. If your citizenship in life is so abhorrent to you, then you can leave it much the same as you can leave a city which you dislike.

It is seen as just that there are penalties and rewards which are given in accordance with the circumstances of life in a Human society. Why then complain of the justice as distributed within the world itself? For in the world, virtue is rewarded and vice receives its proper punishment. It is the same concept to say that in Human society there are merely statues of Gods, but the world itself contains the Gods themselves. The Gods themselves are of course immune to the judgments passed onto them by mere Humans. The Gods put things of this world into their proper place, and put people into new lives in accordance with the consequences of their previous lives. The people who do not recognize this are bound to view the Divine with such insolence such that it becomes vulgar in of itself.

A Human being's task in life is to strive towards becoming the best possible version of themselves. We must further avoid the mistake of thinking that this is possible for ourselves alone, for such a view precludes Goodness within ourselves. We must recognize that other Humans have achieved greatness. We must recognize that there are Good spirits (i.e. Daemons, Guardians) and Gods themselves whose presence is immanent, but whose contemplation is of the Divine alone. We must recognize and honor the most supreme Soul, the Soul of All, which governs this world. We must honor the Intellectual Gods and the supreme ruler of the Intellectual Realm, which is Intellect (i.e. Nous) itself. For the Good of Intellect is manifest perfectly in the multiplicity within the Divine Intellectual Realm.

Those who understand the Divine do not conflate it into one thing, but understand that its greatness is expressed in multiplicity. For the Divine Intellect remains itself, while emanating all of the Divine Intellectual Beings. The Intellectual Beings are all emanated from and contingent on Divine Intellect. The whole of the world is contingent on and emanated by the Divine Intellect as well. The Divine Intellect announces its decrees to those who contemplate it and witness its messengers (i.e. the stars and planets, which are Gods). Though the Gods of this world are not Divinity itself, we are in no way justified to pass judgement and blame onto them. We should not forget that a Human is vastly inferior and in no position to make such judgements. The better the Human, the more modest they are in relation to the Gods, and the more compassionate and understanding they are to all lives. Even those of other Human beings.

We must avoid an oversimplified view of Divinity and maintain humility with respect to our place in nature. Our humble goal should be to reach as far as we are able to given our limitations as Human Beings. We must also pay all other Beings respect for their place as emanations from Divinity itself. We

cannot arrogantly insist that Humans are next in rank to Divinity itself. If we allow ourselves to entertain such a ridiculous fantasy, we also deny ourselves the ability to reach our potential as Human Beings on our journey towards reunion with Divinity. Indeed, we may rise to the likeness of a Divine Intellectual Being. Yet to arrogantly place ourselves beyond Intellect itself can only cause us to descend from it further.

Fools readily accept such absurdities the moment they hear about them. They want to hear that they will not only be superior to other Human Beings, but that they will be superior to the Gods themselves! This is a result of the arrogance inherent to Human Beings. Even a humble and simple citizen is vulnerable to the assertion that they are they are children of Divinity itself, and that other people and their Gods are not. People believe it when they are told that they are superior to the Heavens, even though they have done nothing to be worthy of such distinction. Such foolishness is like people who have never heard of numbers asserting that they are thousands of meters (i.e. cubits) tall, while insisting that everyone else is less than 3 meters (i.e. cubits) tall. Such a fool does not know what a meter is, and at most has a vague notion that a thousand meters is of a considerable length.

Such arrogance brings up another point. Our opponents believe that their supreme God cares and provides for them. If this is really true, how could such a supreme God be indifferent about the world in which they exist? Perhaps their supreme God is too busy to look after this world. Yet if that is so, then such a God would be too busy to look after people as well. Surely if such a God cares for people, such a God also cares for the environment people live in. If such a God cannot see the cosmos outside of itself, it cannot see the people within the cosmos outside itself either.

To say that Human Beings do not need the care of Divinity is false. Divinity sees that the world is arranged as it should be, including the people in it and the conditions these people experience. Those who are friendly with the Divine humbly accept the results of Divinities governance. They are right to do so, for the proper order of things does not depend on the experience of a Human Being. It depends on the totality of all circumstances in the cosmos. A friend of the Divine pays the respect to all things that they are due. A friend of the Divine directs themselves towards the path of reunification (which all things that can direct themselves are capable of). This path is not limited to one type of Being. All Beings which succeed in this journey obtain bliss, while everyone else meets a fate in congruence with their nature.

It is wrong to assume that only oneself can achieve this Happiness. Further, to merely assert oneself as being in possession of Happiness is insufficient for achieving true possession of Happiness. There are many people who brag that they have achieved some Good while remaining perfectly aware that they haven't really done so. Some people even truly believe that they have reached it in spite of the fact that they have not. The biggest fool of all believes that they alone have achieved Goodness, when they alone have not.

2.9.10 Outline of the Most Absurd Tenet to be Refuted

We could analyze each claim made by the school of our opponents and evaluate how they stand to reason. Yet we will avoid doing so as gesture of friendship to those among us who (perhaps embarrassingly to us) were involved with the school before our friendship began and somehow remain attached to it. This school presents its positions freely enough, whether it is to give off the appearance of validity or because its students actually believe in the doctrines genuinely. Nevertheless, our intended audience is not the school itself, but those among our friends who are drawn towards it. Although we have little hope of convincing the school itself, we hope to protect our friends from being drawn in by a school which does not offer proof of their claims. How could this school provide any proof? Their beliefs are express using arbitrary and unquestionable commandments. A different tone would be required to

deal with people who directly attack the Beautiful and Wise teachings of Divinely inspired philosophers (i.e. Plato), but we shall leave that aside. Those of our friends who have been paying attention this far already possesses the tools to address every other claim made by the school of our opponents.

We will address one last tenet of this school before changing our focus. We must address it, for it surpasses all of their other tenets in foolishness (if it can even be called foolish). This claim is that Soul and a certain Wisdom (i.e. Sophia in Gnosticism) has descended downwards. Either Soul descended First causing Wisdom to descend also, Wisdom descended First causing Soul to descend also, or they both had an inclination to descend simultaneously (perhaps because they are conflated to be one in the same). They hold that all other Souls, acting like arms of Wisdom, enter into bodies, such as Human bodies. Yet somehow, the primordial Soul, whose descent was the basis for the descent of the other Souls, did not truly descend in actuality. Rather its descent is like the illumination of darkness. This illumination of darkness produces the formation of an image of Soul into Matter (i.e. Wisdom, the image of the Soul in Gnosticism). Afterwards, from this image of Soul another image is formed (i.e. the Demiurge in Gnosticism) beneath it through Matter, Materiality, or whichever of the obfuscating niche terms they choose to call it (i.e. Fruit of the Fall in Gnosticism). The Demiurge then rejects its mother, Wisdom, and becomes severed from it. Afterwards, the Demiurge serves as the master of the sensible world. The entirety of the sensible world, down to the smallest image Formed into Matter, is derived from this Demiurge and has no link to its mother Wisdom. This view is so absurd and blasphemous, that it can only be thought of as contemptuous.

2.9.11 Analysis of Illuminating Darkness and Procession of Images

For one, if Soul has merely illuminated the darkness (i.e. Matter in Gnosticism) without descending, how can anyone rightly say that it has fallen? The fact that light emanates from it and reaches the sensible realm does not justify the claim that Soul has fallen in any way. The only way such a claim makes sense is if Soul needs to move down to the sensible realm to facilitate this illumination. If Soul illuminates the darkness of the sensible world while remaining above it, what is to stop the things which are superior to Soul from providing illumination as well?

If Soul creates a rational plan for the order of the universe, and then illuminates the darkness using this plan, why is this process broken down into two steps? Why doesn't Soul illuminate the darkness (i.e. impart Form into Matter) at the same time as it discursively creates the images it will use to illuminate the darkness? Put another way, why doesn't Soul impart Form into Matter along the way as it generates its plan for the formation of the sensible world?

Our opponents refer to this rational conception of the sensible world as the foreign land. They hold that the creation of these foreign lands was the cause of the downfall of the superior beings who created it, but this cannot be the case. Our opponents hold that the illumination of matter produced images of Soul instead of bodies. Yet Wisdom and Soul have no need for darkness (i.e. Matter). Anything created directly in their image would be similar and remain connected to them. Thus, they would have no need of darkness either. What is the nature of these images of Soul? Are they Beings, or merely a thought (as they say)?

If they are Real Beings, then what differentiates them from Wisdom and Soul? If an image is distinct from the Soul associated with Wisdom, then it must be the Soul associated with the animation of bodies (i.e. the Unreasoning Soul). The issue here is that the purported purpose of these images is for them to glorify their creator. How can something created without the ability to think have the cognition to honor its creator? What could our opponents mean when they say that such an act of creation is out of arrogance and pride? Certainly this destroys any idea of creation via representation and planning. What is more, why would the mother of the Demiurge create it out of image and darkness?

If images are just thoughts, then our opponents need to explain what they mean by this, and why they choose to use this term. Further, they must explain how anything else is created unless Soul imparts these thoughts with the capacity for creation. Yet how could creative power reside in a created thing that is not real? They speak of a procession of created things, but they have no argument or reason for the order they present. For example, is Fire created First, and then everything after it?

2.9.12 The Cause of the Sensible World and Soul's Descent

How does the image which acts as the Demiurge go about generating the sensible world? In order to create things in the image of Real Beings, this Demiurge would need to have perceived these Real Beings. Yet since this Demiurge and its mother were generated after the Real Beings, how could they know about things that occurred before they were able to perceive them?

Our opponents tell us that they themselves have come into the sensible world as genuine Souls (which were around before Wisdom and the Demiurge), not merely Images of Soul. They say that through great difficulty a select few among them have been able to penetrate beyond the fog of the sensible world and remember Real Beings they had encountered before. Yet the Demiurge and its mother Wisdom are said to have been able to conceive of these Real Beings (if only diminished versions of them). Not only do they say that Wisdom and the Demiurge can form a conception of these Beings (in spite of the fact that they never witnessed them), but also that they can attain an understanding of the nature of the Intellectual realm antecedent to the sensible world. They say that Wisdom and the Demiurge use this knowledge to discover the Elements of the sensible world.

Why did Wisdom begin by generating the element of Fire? Did Wisdom deduce that Fire had to be First? If not, then why not start with a different element? If Wisdom created Fire First because it conceived of Fire First, why not extend to the entirety of the sensible world? Surely a conception of each of the Elements could only come from a conception of the entire sensible world as a whole. So, then why not generate the entire sensible world at once?

An allegory of the Demiurge as an artist or craftsmen is not warranted. The generation of the sensible world must be in accordance with the laws of Nature. It is not prudent to try and learn about the process of creating worlds from the process of creating arts and crafts. Art and crafts as a whole are posterior to Nature and the generation of the sensible world itself. Even today, the generation of new particulars by the forces of nature today do not occur in a strict order. We do not see bits of Fire, Water, and Earth generated one at a time, only to be mingled together afterwards. What we see is that all things are produced harmoniously and in conjunction with one another. The entirety of the potential for a living thing is present in its Ideal Form, which then is impressed into the germinated seed or fertilized egg that becomes the life itself. All of the Elements within a living thing increase in tandem as the seeds germinate or the embryo grows over time. Isn't it reasonable to say that this is true for the sensible world as well? Why shouldn't we say that all of the Elements are already present within the Ideal Form of the sensible world, which then is impressed onto Matter? Perhaps our opponents will arrogantly claim that they (supposedly being among the select few genuine Souls) would have created the sensible world this way, but that the Demiurge was too stupid to do so.

This supposedly limited Demiurge was able to generate the Heavenly realm, devise the circular paths of each Heavenly body, and calculate the declines and inclines of the Zodiac. This is clearly not the work of an unintelligent lesser Being, but must be the work of a master. We hold that the Demiurge, the All Soul, is subservient only to the most Divine Beings and receives its power and instructions from them directly.

Even our opponents begrudgingly admit this in spite of themselves. For this is the only way anyone can truly conceive the act of illuminating darkness (as Gnostics put it). How could this illumination take place unless it was absolutely necessary? This illumination must either occur naturally or unnaturally. If this process is naturally occurring, then it must have always been occurring. After all, natural processes do not require someone or something to initiate them. They happen organically. If this illumination of darkness is not a naturally occurring process, then we have found an unnatural process which is antecedent to the sensible world. This is because the illumination of darkness is the process which generates the sensible world. Because things which are discordant to nature are Evil, this would mean that Evil is also antecedent to the Natural world and has its seat in the Intellectual Realm. Evil will thus be the manifestation of its Intellectual Principle, and Soul will bring harm to the sensible world instead of the sensible world causing harm to Soul. In short, this doctrine places Evil as one of the most primordial Principles, along with Matter in which Evil arises. After all, our opponents say that after Soul fell, it illuminated the darkness (i.e. Matter) which was already present.

So where did this darkness come from? If they say that Soul created it after its fall, then they arrive at a contradiction. Where could Soul fall to if there was no darkness beneath it to fall to? Since darkness does not exist before the downfall of Soul, it cannot be the cause of Soul's downfall. Soul must descend as a result of its own nature. Since the Fall of Soul is a result of its own nature, we can trace the cause of this to the source of Soul's nature, and ultimately back to the most primordial of First principles.

2.9.13 The Sensible World Has Purpose and Should Not Be Scorned

Those who complain about the sensible world fail to understand their insolence in doing so, and fail to see the path that this insolence puts them on. They do not understand the order of procession and the continuity which connects everything from First, to Second, to Third, and so on until their ultimate conclusion. Nothing should be scorned for being inferior to that which comes First. We must humbly accept that everything has its place within nature while striving to reunite with the First principles. While our opponents see this as a withdrawal from the tragedy of the sensible world, in reality everything is arranged graciously for the benefit of the whole system.

The sensible world is only frightening to those who have not received knowledge of the way things are and the reasons they must be that way (i.e. gnosis). While the Heavenly realm is comprised of Fire, this does not make it frightening. The movements of the fiery celestial bodies are in harmony with the whole, which is to the benefit of Earth as well. Further, our opponents ought to judge the celestial bodies based on the content of their Souls. After all, our opponents anoint themselves as honorable based on the supposed content of their own Souls.

The Heavenly bodies are greatest among bodies in both size and beauty. Their movements are perfectly cooperative with Nature. Their existence is guaranteed as a result of the Eternal First principles. Their importance is demonstrable given that they comprise a large portion of the cosmos and serve to make it complete. If Humans are said to rank highly among living Beings, then surely the Heavenly bodies rank higher. They provide order and beauty, never tyranny. We cannot blame them for tragic events. While they may signal that tragedy will come, they do not cause tragedies themselves. As for the influence the Heavenly bodies do impart onto others, the fate everything meets is also influenced by many other factors. The destinies of Human beings are caused by the time of their birth, the place of their birth, and the disposition of their Souls. To do so is to confuse the nature of things in the sensible world with the nature of things in the Divine.

It is not proper to consider Evil as a gradient of decreasing Wisdom, as though those things with less Wisdom were somehow more Evil. The fact that plant life is less Wise than animal life does not make it more Evil. The fact that non-sentient animals are less wise than sentient ones does not make them more Evil. If it did, we would be forced to admit that the Divine was Evil as well since there are grades of Wisdom there too. While Soul is inferior in Wisdom to Nous (i.e. Divine Intellect), Nous is inferior in Wisdom to the One (i.e. The Good).

2.9.14 An Examination of Spirits Causing Disease, and Motivations for Such a Belief

This is not the only way our opponents insult the Divine. They create magical spells and charms and believe that they can use them to reach Soul. They even believe that they can reach beyond Soul and contact Divine Intellectual Beings. They believe that they can coerce superior beings with their enchantments. What else could they mean when they claim that if you master the words and rituals of their own creation, you can reach these supreme Beings and produce results to your own benefit? Since they appear to believe that their own words are more dignified than the supreme Beings they hope to reach (since these words supposedly can compel them), they unwittingly deny the dignity of these supreme Beings.

They claim that they can cure themselves of disease. If they mean that they can cure themselves by living a healthy and temperate life, they would be correct and in congruence with Wisdom. But if they assert that diseases are caused by spiritual forces, and claim that they can cure such diseases by exorcising these spirits, they are only charlatans attempting to impress the masses with their supposedly magical powers. Those who think critically will come to see that disease is not caused by spirits, but by overexertion, overconsumption, poor nutrition, deterioration of the body, and disordered bodily functions.

The true nature of illness is made clear by the things which successfully treat them. A disease is usually cured variously by the administration of medicine, the expulsion of poisons from the stomach, the letting of blood, or by fasting. How can our opponents explain this? Does fasting starve the spirit, driving it out? Does the purging of the stomach or blood also purge the body of the spirit itself, or does the spirit remain in the body? If the spirit is not purged when a person becomes well, why doesn't the spirit continue to make the person sick? If the spirit has been expelled as well, by what mechanism do these cures expel it? If it is because the spirit is feeding off of the disease, then the disease is not caused by the spirit as they claim. If a spirit enters into our body without any physiological cause, then why isn't this constantly happening, making us perpetually ill? If there is a physiological cause which invites the spirit, again we must conclude that the nature of illness is physiological, and we have no need to posit a relationship with spirits. Surely it is not the case that spirits are sitting by, waiting to possess us at the moment that any physiological ailments present themselves.

The motivations for our opponents should now be clear. In fact, this is in large part why the topic of disease and spirits has been given this much attention. It is up to you to examine the other claims made by our opponents with reason and care. You will see how our form philosophy cultivates a simple and honest moral character in addition to its other benefits. We seek clarity of thought and reason, humility and reverence for the Divine, confidence tempered by reason, and understanding by prudent and logical investigation. Comparisons to other schools of thought should be approached with these goals and strategies in mind. You will find that the tenets of our opponents are bound by a different agenda which does not deserve any more examination here.

2.9.15 The Consequences of Ignoring Virtue

There is one thing that is deserving of more examination here. Namely, the effect the doctrines of our opponents have on the people who are persuaded by them. These doctrines breed a hatred and disdain for the world and the things within it.

There are two leading theories as to what the goal of life should be. One advocates bodily pleasure as life's ultimate goal. The other advocates for virtue and Beauty, with the desire for such stemming from the Divine and leading back to the Divine (see notes on Ennead One, Second Tractate).

Epicurus denied Divine Providence, and thus concludes that all anyone has left is the pursuit of bodily pleasures. Our opponents hold a doctrine even more dangerous than this. They place blame on the administration of the world by Divine Providence, and scorn Providence itself. They accuse it of wrongdoing, and reject all of the laws and Virtues which have been discovered to be in accordance with it throughout history. They deny that Beauty can be found at all among Human life. They even deny the Justice and Temperance which is intrinsic to all Human Beings and can be refined through education and training. In short, they deny Human Virtue of any kind. They're left with the selfish pursuit of things that will advance their own life. People who adhere to such doctrines will become despicable, unless their intrinsic character just so happens to be better than such poisonous teachings.

Their problem is that they deny any Good in the present world, so they see no reason to pursue Good in this life. They can only look forward to something they expect to come to them in the future. If they truly possessed gnosis (i.e. knowledge), they would know that they shouldn't push off the pursuit of Good for another time. They would know that to achieve Goodness in higher spheres, they should First improve themselves in the lower spheres. Those who can conceive of Beauty at all receive this ability from the Divine, and this imparts onto their nature an intrinsic ability to understand the limited gratification bodily pleasures can offer. Those who don't possess any Virtue are not motivated to these higher goals, and cannot progress towards Divinity.

This school of our opponents is characterized by its lack of any account off Virtue. They do not define Virtue, they do not describe the different aspects of Virtue, there is no mention of ancient teachings about Virtue, they do not teach what constitutes Virtue and how it is cultivated, and they do not mention how the Soul ought to be cared for and purified. They make vague statements, such as "Look to God", without any instruction as to what this means in terms of practical application. For all we can discern, it could be possible to look to God without sacrificing any bodily pleasure or reigning in our bodily impulses. To them it might be sufficient to repeat the word of God while being owned by every passion and appetite, and without any need to overcome them.

In fact, it is Virtue that leads one towards the true goal of a life. It is virtue that illuminates the Divine when combined with Wisdom in the Soul. When uttered without Virtue, God is nothing more than a name.

2.9.16 We Should Not Hate the Sensible World

To hate the sensible world, the Gods within it, and all other Beauty within it does not make someone Good. In fact, a truly Evil person would already hate the Gods. Someone who was only partly Evil might not hate the Gods, but such a person would certainly become completely Evil once their hatred of the Gods began.

In spite of the fact that our opponents claim to respect the Intellectual Gods, their disdain for the sensible world proves otherwise. How could they love the Intellectual Gods when they hate the

creations of these Gods so much? Surely if you love something, then you will have some level of affection towards things which resemble it. Yet our opponents have only disdain for the images of the Intellectual Gods they claim to admire. Our opponents hate the children whose father they claim to love. Indeed, every particular Soul is like a child, and its source Intellectual principle is thus like its father. In the Heavenly bodies, their Souls are much more closely linked to their Intellectual source than those of a Human. This is to say that the Gods of the sensible world (i.e. the Heavenly bodies) are aligned with the Gods of the Intellectual realm. The sensible realm cannot be severed from the Divine Intellectual Realm. This fact will be discussed elsewhere, but this is mentioned at present to prove a point. If someone claims to have disdain for the objects of the sensible world while proclaiming to love the Gods of the Intellectual realm, then they do not understand the nature of the Gods. At best, they know their names.

How can anyone be pious if they deny that Divine Providence also extends to the sensible world? How can anyone be taken seriously if they also claim that Providence extends to them, but not to others? Did it only extend to them when they were in the intellectual realm, or does it reach them in the sensible world as well? If it only reached them in the Intellectual Realm, why did they leave? If it extends to them here, why isn't Divinity (i.e. God in Gnosticism) here as well? How will Divinity know that they have not succumbed to the sensible world and become Evil? If Divinity knows about those in the sensible world who have not become Evil, it must also know the ones who have. It must keep track of everyone to make such distinctions. In that case, Divinity is present (via however it tracks who is or isn't Evil) to everyone, and is thus present in the sensible world. Thus, the sensible world participates in Divinity. If Divinity is not present in the sensible world, it is also not present among our opponents, and they should have nothing to say about it or its reach.

In any case, whether Divinity extends to our opponents or not, it certainly provides for the sensible world and will not abandon it. Providence extends to the whole of the sensible world more carefully than it extends to its particular parts. For Participation in Divinity is much more comprehensive for the Soul of All than it is for any particular Soul. This is validated by the fact that the sensible world exists and is highly ordered. After all, isn't the whole of the sensible world ordered in better accordance with the Intellectual than these supposedly intelligent teachers among our opponents? In fact, the comparison to the sensible world and these fools would be blasphemous in of itself were it not made only to prove a point.

Scorn for the sensible world could only exist in a fool devoid of reason and blind to both the Intellectual realm and sensible world itself. How could a musician who understands the beautiful harmony of the intellectual Realm not be moved by the beautiful harmony in music when they hear it with their own ears? What mathematician who understands the beautiful proportions of geometry is not moved by seeing these proportions in the sensible world with their own eyes? Consider even visual art. When people see a piece of artwork, they recognize that it is more than a mundane physical object. They recognize that it is a representation of something more, a representation of something Ideal (i.e. Intellectual). The recognition that this piece of art is a physical representation of something Ideal is like a process of remembrance. This recollection of the truth is the same process which brings about an experience of love.

If the sight of a Beautiful face can lead our minds to the Divine Intellectual Realm, how can the same process not occur when we witness the vast Beauty of the sensible world? How can someone fail to see the Beauty in the symmetry and order of the stars above? How foolish must someone be not to see that

the Beauty of the Intellectual Realm is reflected in the sensible world? Clearly, someone who cannot see the Beauty of the sensible world has no understanding of its source either.

2.9.17 Beauty of the Sensible World Reflects Beauty of the Divine

Perhaps our opponents derive their hatred for the Sensible world from a misreading of Plato. After all, Plato warns us that the body is a hindrance to the Soul, and rightly teaches us that the sensible world is inferior to the Intellectual Realm. Then they should use their capacity for reason to negate the sensible world away and abstract what is left. They will find that the Intellectual Realm remains, which contains the Ideal Form of the sensible world itself. They will find Soul, which imparts bodyless magnitude (i.e. space) into the sensible world as commensurately as is possible with the greatness of the Ideal Form of the sensible world. Then, they can choose how to view the sensible world. Either it is in motion under the administration of Divinity from beginning to end, or it is at rest because there is nothing within it yet to be moved. In either case, they will have obtained a good impression of the Soul which governs the sensible world. Now let them imagine a body as governed by this Soul. This body then does not affect Soul whatsoever. Rather, Soul imparts into this body everything that it possibly can. After all, Divinity does not covet anything. Finally, they should recognize that this Soul must have all of the power necessary to impart as much of the Beauty of the Divine as is possible to this body of the sensible world. It is this Divine Beauty which motivates and moves Soul, as Soul is Divine as well.

If our opponents do not recognize this Beauty in the sensible world, then they must not distinguish between Beautiful and Ugly bodies. Further, they shouldn't distinguish between Beautiful and shameful conduct in life. They should not recognize the Beauty in anything of the sensible world, and therefore they would have no way to contemplate the Beauty of Divinity itself. The Beauty of the Divine is the source for all Beauty in the sensible world. Thus, those who are not moved by the Beauty of the sensible world cannot be moved by the Beauty of Divinity. This is because the Beauty of the sensible world is the same as the Beauty from the Divine Intellectual Being from which it is derived, only contingent and diluted. Our opponent's scorn for the Beauty of the sensible world is only justified if it is aimed at avoiding the lustful temptations of young women and boys. In actuality, their self-satisfaction does not come from scorning what is ugly, it comes from the perverted pride of hating things that they once recognized as desirable.

We should take note that a part of something cannot be as Beautiful as the whole it belongs to. Even the collection of every individual part of something cannot be as Beautiful as the cohesive whole. So, our opponents should see that in the realm of sense objects and particular parts, any particular thing which is of great Beauty (such as Daemons) only serves to prove the Divinity of that which generates it. Such an understanding serves as recognition that the Divine must be supremely Beautiful, and is not evidence of mistaken focus on the objects of the sensible world. The Wise uses the Beauty of the sensible world as a means to understand the Beauty of the divine.

In anything which is truly Beautiful, it must be Beautiful both inside and out. An inner Ugliness must manifest externally as well. Anyone who believes that someone can be Beautiful on the outside, yet vile on the inside does not understand what Beauty really is. The closest thing to a person with a Beautiful exterior and an Ugly interior can only be someone who is Beautiful in Essence, but who has acquired Ugliness accidental to their nature. There are many traps and obstacles in the sensible world.

Yet what obstacle could prevent the whole of the universe from being Ugly inside? Clearly it is Beautiful on the outside, and so it must be on the inside as well. Things which are imperfect at their generation can certainly fail to reach perfection. Perhaps it is impossible for them to reach perfection. Yet the

whole of the universe is not born imperfect. It is not like a child, which must grow out of its own immaturity. Since it always has been the whole of the universe, it doesn't even make sense to think of it as growing. The same is true for the Soul of All (i.e. the Soul of the universe). It cannot grow and improve. If we somehow granted growth of the Soul of All as possible, it would still be impossible for it to grow worse and more Evil.

2.9.18 The Fatal Errors of Vanity, Jealousy, and Ignorance

Our opponents may say that our view binds our Soul to our body, while their beliefs help their soul to take flight and abandon the body. To dismiss this absurdity, consider the following hypothetical scenario. Two people live in a Beautiful house. One of these people curses its construction and architect, but keeps living in it in spite of these complaints. The other person admires the proficiency of the architect, and happily lives in the house until they no longer require a house to live in. The first person considers themselves to be wiser and in a better position to leave the house, as they know its walls are made of Soulless stone and wood. They see that it is far from Ideal. Yet this first person fails to see that their real distinguishing characteristic is an inability to bear with the necessity of living in a house (assuming that their complaints aren't secretly an indication that they find the stones and wood Beautiful). So long as we are embodied, we must dwell within the body that Soul has effortlessly provided to us, as if Soul were a loving sister.

Do our opponents balk at calling Soul a sister, while readily referring to the most mundane of Human beings as their brother? Could they be so vile as to be offended at the prospect of kinship with the sun, the stars, the Heavenly bodies, and the Soul of All itself? Perhaps they are on to something, as kinship with such Beautiful things is not for the vile. Only such beings which have become Good are no longer merely a body, but embodied Soul. The way in which they animate bodies is in harmony with the animation of the whole of the universe by the Soul of All. This entails temperance, self-restraint, avoiding conflict, prevailing over temptation, and reaming steadfast even when things are difficult. The Soul of All then remains resolute, as there is nothing which can affect it.

Human Beings must seek Virtue to avoid these assaults. We can render these blows smaller with Intellectual focus, eventually nullifying them through strength and maturity. When we reach the point at which we are hardly phased by these temptations and distractions, we imitate the Soul of All. When we finally attain likeness to the Soul of All, our goals become the same as those of the Soul of All. We must leverage our natural gifts and work hard to achieve this state of contemplation, but the Heavenly bodies are this way from the start.

Our opponents may claim that this achievement is reserved for themselves alone, but this vanity does not bring them any closer in actuality. They claim that they can leave this universe behind, while the Heavenly bodies are bound to maintain the order of the sensible world. Yet such claims betray a lack of understanding as to what it means to have left. They do not understand how the Soul of All cares for those things which are not ensouled. We seek to be free from attachment to the body, to live a pure life, to be unfazed by death, and to understand that which is above and strive towards it. Yet we seek this path without jealousy of other people who possess the same goals and pursue them with dedication. Our opponents claim that such people are not really on the right path, and make the same error in their assessment of the Heavenly bodies. To our opponents, both are standing still. Yet our opponents deny that the stars can see beyond the sensible world because they themselves fail to see that their Souls are outside of the sensible world.